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Diana T Fritz 06/05/2007 04:17:03 PM From DB/Inbox: Search Results

Cable
Text:

CONFIDENTIAL

SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

January 13, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 194 - UNKNOWN)
TAGS: PHUM
Captions: None
Subject: UPDATE ON DETENTION OF FILIPINO PASTOR IN DUBAI
Ref: None

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 00194

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: POL
INFO: AMB DCM P/M ECON RSO

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB: MWAHBA
DRAFTED: POL: MMENARD
CLEARED: A/DCM: TWILLIAMS; CGD: ROLSON; POL: SWILLIAMS

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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7865
INFO RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI IMMEDIATE 2689

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000194

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DRL/CRA, DRL/IRF, DRL/PHD, NEA AND NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/13/08
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON DETENTION OF FILIPINO PASTOR IN DUBAI

¶1. (U) Classified by Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶2. (U) This cable has been coordinated with Congen Dubai.

¶3. (C) SUMMARY: Post is actively engaged in this matter and will provide updates on future case developments as they occur. Arrested on 12 November for openly proselytizing in a shopping mall, Pastor Fernando Alconga was subsequently released on bail after providing his passport (and his wife's passport) to the police as security for his appearance in court. As of 8 January, the prosecutor has not yet made a decision on whether to proceed with charges. That same day, Dubai CG spoke with the Chairman of the Dubai Ruler's Court, expressing the USG's concern about the case and recommending that the case be resolved in a quiet manner. The Chairman was receptive

to Dubai CG's comments and promised to look into the matter. END SUMMARY.

Pastor arrested and detained for proselytizing...

14. (C) UAEG authorities and other post contacts report that Reverend Fernando Alconga, a Filipino citizen, UAE resident and pastor with the UAE Council of Evangelical Churches and for the King Redeemer Church in Ras Al-Khaimah Emirate, was arrested on 12 November 2002 at a shopping mall in Dubai for proselytizing. Alconga was reportedly investigated by the Dubai Criminal Investigative Division after they received a complaint from a Muslim Egyptian national that Alconga distributed Christian literature at that same location on 11 November 2002. The Dubai CID reportedly spoke with Alconga and discovered Christian literature translated into several languages. Based on their investigation, the Dubai CID arrested Alconga for proselytizing.

15. (C) The Dubai Police held Alconga for a short time and then released him on bail, holding his and his wife's passports as security to ensure his appearance in court. (Note: We have been unable to confirm Alconga's release date, but believe that he was released in mid-December 2002. End note.)

16. (C) UAE authorities and contacts report that, as of 8 January, the prosecutor has not yet made a decision on the case, i.e., whether to prosecute and, if so, on what charge and for what penalty (e.g., fine, deportation, imprisonment). Contacts report that the prosecutor will notify Alconga of the charge when he makes that decision and then the trial will begin two weeks after notification of the charge.

...but allowed to preach actively while on bail

17. (C) Since Alconga's release on bail, he has appeared before various congregations, speaking about his arrest and thanking parishioners for their support. (Note: A contact informs that a Dubai parishioner is paying Alconga's legal fees. End note.) We have not received any reports that the police have tried to prevent Alconga from preaching or otherwise speaking to various religious groups.

18. (C) Post has also learned through contacts that Alconga's visa was due to expire in January 2003, and that he was planning an imminent return to the Philippines at the time of his arrest. It is the opinion of many here that Alconga chose to proselytize at this time because he believed that, if arrested, he would be deported and he planned to leave the country anyway.

19. (C) Alconga's arrest appears to have garnered more sympathy from religious groups outside the UAE than with the religious community within the UAE. One member of the evangelical community in Dubai noted to CG Olson that his congregation has little sympathy for Alconga, based on the general feeling that he "went too far." Religious leaders here confirm that the police do not ordinarily seek out people expressing religious beliefs and will not interfere with religious practices unless someone complains about the practice to the police and the practice is in violation of the law.

Dubai Ruler's Court weighing options

110. (C) On 8 January, Dubai CG Olson contacted Dr. Khalifa Suleiman, Chairman of the Dubai Ruler's Court, and raised the issue of Alconga's arrest. The CG briefed Dr. Suleiman on the case and noted that the arrest is the subject of increasing concern in the U.S., particularly in evangelical circles. The CG then urged Dr. Suleiman to consider ways in which this matter can be handled quietly, since it is in

Dubai's interest to act in a way that would minimize negative publicity on this issue for the UAE. Dr. Suleiman took the point and readily agreed to look into the matter as soon as possible. Post will report on Dr. Suleiman's response when received.

¶11. (U) COMMENT: Post is actively engaged in this matter. Although there may be rising concern voiced to Main State from different U.S. religious groups, we note that we have heard from only one member of the resident religious community on this case, the Government Liaison for the UAE Council of Evangelical Churches, who called to inform us about the incident. The lack of complaints from the local religious community likely stems from the fact that members are aware that Alconga was openly proselytizing in a public place in violation of the law here and had the misfortune to distribute literature to someone who later complained to the police. One contact commented that many believe that Alconga overstepped what he knew to be the local boundaries and, in so doing, disturbed what everyone considers an acceptable status quo regarding religious freedom in Dubai and the UAE. We have received no indication, however, that the Dubai police or prosecution will use this case as a springboard to interfere with religious freedom here generally. We will provide updates on future case developments as they occur. END COMMENT.

WAHBA